



# Women and HIV/AIDS in California Fact Sheet



## Introduction

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Women comprise about 8% of all reported AIDS cases yet are the fastest growing population with AIDS in California. Latino and African American women are infected in greater numbers than their share of the population. This shows the shift in populations affected by the epidemic. For California women, sex with an HIV-infected male is the most common route of transmission. Sharing infected needles and syringes is the second most common route of transmission for women.

## Children (0-12 years)

Most infants and children with AIDS in this age group are exposed by their mothers either before or during birth, or through breast-feeding. Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) accounts for the majority of AIDS cases among those 0-12 years of age. Nearly two-thirds of all children diagnosed with AIDS at age 0-12 years have died. Encouragingly, the number of infants and children diagnosed with AIDS each year has been dropping since 1992, and the annual number of AIDS-related deaths in children has decreased as well. These figures may be the result of anti-HIV medications developed to prolong the health of people living with HIV infection and decrease the chance of infants being infected by their HIV-infected mothers.

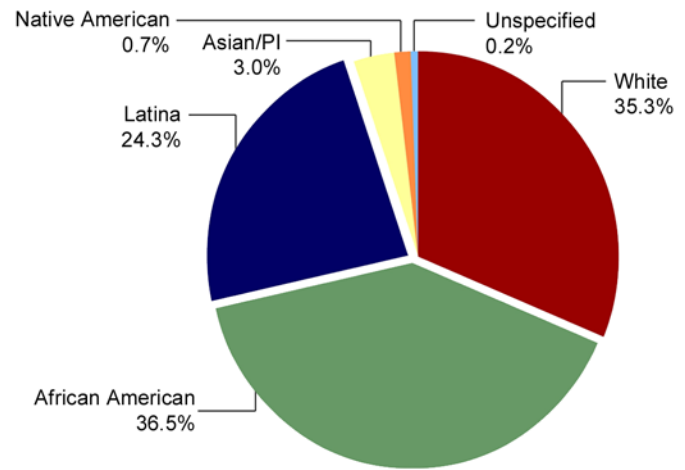
## Women of childbearing age (13-49 years)

In California, 84% of females diagnosed with AIDS are women of childbearing age. The majority of these women report that they were infected by heterosexual contact. HIV infection through injection drug use is also a large contributor. Women who are HIV-infected should be aware that, if they become pregnant, their baby might also become infected with HIV. Good prenatal care, the use of anti-HIV medications, and avoiding breast-feeding have resulted in decreased MTCT.

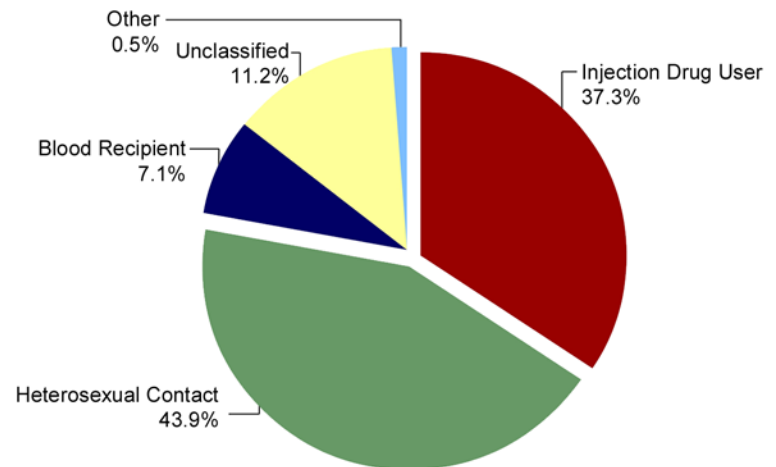
## Women age 50 and over (50+)

Women 50+ must be aware that AIDS is not just a disease of the young. In California, women in this age category represent nearly 12% of the total number of reported female AIDS cases. Most women 50+ have become infected with HIV by having unprotected sex with an infected male.

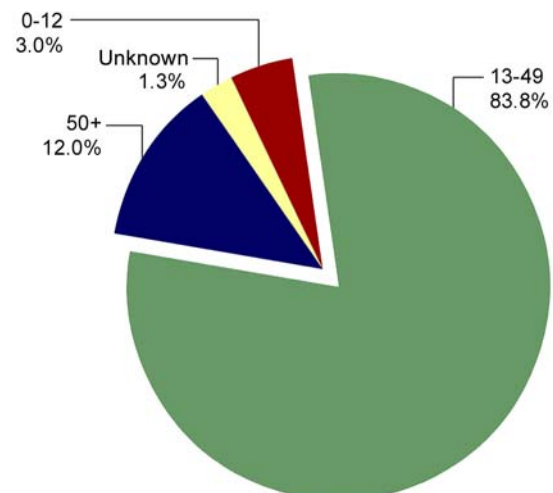
California Women with AIDS by Race/Ethnicity  
(based on all reported AIDS cases as of 12/02)



California Women with AIDS by Mode of Exposure  
(based on all reported AIDS cases as of 12/02)



California Female AIDS Cases by Age at Diagnosis  
(based on all reported AIDS cases as of 12/02)





# Women and HIV/AIDS in California

## What Women Need to Know



### It is important to know that:

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS;
- Anyone who has unprotected sex or shares injection drug needles can become infected with HIV;
- A person can look and feel healthy and be infected with HIV;
- An HIV-infected woman can infect her baby during pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding.

### Think about getting tested for HIV if you (or your partner):

- Have ever shared needles or syringes;
- Have ever had vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an HIV-infected person without using a condom;
- Have multiple sex partners and do not always use a condom;
- Have or had a sexually transmitted disease;
- Have ever used alcohol or drugs and do not remember what happened;
- Are pregnant or thinking about having a baby.

### Early signs of HIV infection in some women can include:

- Frequent 'female' problems or an abnormal pap smear;
- Pain in the pelvic area when you do not have your period;
- Yeast infections that do not go away or keep coming back.

### HIV can be spread from one person to another by:

- *Blood* (sharing needles or syringes; mother-to-infant);
- *Semen and vaginal fluids* (unprotected sex);
- *Breastmilk* (breast-feeding).

### You CANNOT become infected with HIV by:

- Being around someone who has HIV at home, work, school, or daycare;
- Casual contact such as closed mouth kissing, hugging, and shaking hands;
- The air, swimming pools, or touching things such as drinking glasses, doorknobs, or toilet seats;
- Mosquito or other insect bites.

### If you are, or think you might be HIV-infected, or if you have AIDS:

- See your health care provider. Ask what you can do to protect yourself and others. Programs are available for low-income Californians who cannot afford to pay for HIV health care.

### To find out more information about HIV/AIDS, or about getting an HIV test:

- Call the California AIDS Hotline;  
1-800-367-AIDS (English/Spanish/Filipino)  
1-888-225-AIDS (TDD)
- Call the National AIDS Hotline;  
1-800-342-AIDS (English)  
1-800-344-SIDA (Spanish)  
1-800-243-7889 (TDD)
- Look in your phone book under "community services" or "AIDS information" for organizations such as the health department, local HIV/AIDS organizations, and women's health clinics.

